DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 178 805 CG 013 916

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TITLE Strategies for the Modification and Prevention of Racial Prejudice in Children: A Review.
PUB DATE [78]
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (59th, San Diego, California, April 5-8, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavior Change; *Bias; *Changing Attitudes; Children; Curriculum Evaluation; Ethnic Studies; *Multicultural Education; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Program Evaluation; *Racial Discrimination; Racial Factors; *Social Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the literature related to the formation of stereotypical racial attitudes in children and then organizes and reviews strategies for modification and prevention of such stereotypes. Racial attitudes of preschool and early school age Anglo, Black, and Chicano children towards themselves and each other are included. A brief overview of the evidence suggests that racial awareness is formed by ages three-four, and that by the age of five children hold prejudicial attitudes towards members of other races. The paper addresses and evaluates efforts to modify such attitudes in children, divided into what is labeled curriculum approaches and reinforcement procedure approaches. Six curriculum programs are reviewed which variously use multi-ethnic readers, stories portraying minorities in favorable positions and statuses, black consciousness curriculum, films, art activities, and other experimental curriculum activities involving skin color. Seven reinforcement based modification studies, which attempted to change children's responses to white and black stimuli are evaluated. As a whole these strategies have not been effective, although they have shown that children's racial responses are malleable in the short run. Studies with the longest involvement of time, integrated curriculum classroom approaches, and highly dedicated models are the most likely to reach success. This literature suggests that an approach geared to giving children early positive identification of various racial groupings and configurations is a potentially useful preventive strategy with preschool children. (Author/BHW)

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EJ178805

Strategies for the Modification and Prevention of Racial Prejudice in Children: A Review

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Racial prejudice is widespread throughout the United States and represents a major social problem affecting this nation. Such prejudicial attitudes are part and parcel of the everyday fabric of society transcending age, occupation, and educational stratum, and transmitted via media, written and spoken work, and actions. While prejudice based on race is not restricted to any particular ethnic group, it is a particularly common and recalcitrant attitude held by the dominant Anglo (White) culture in contemporary America.

Evidence consistently suggests that racial awareness is formed at early ages of life (Blake & Dennis, 1943; Gregor & McPherson, 1966; Litcher & Johnson, 1969). Stevenson, for example, has shown that children are aware of their own race by three or four years of age, and by the age of five hold prejudicial attitudes towards members of other races.

This evidence that racial attitudes are formed early in the life of a child and reflects subtle communications on the part of parents, teachers, and others strongly suggests that the pre-school or early school age child and his/her environment be targeted as primary foci for efforts at the modification and/or prevention of racial bias.

As Black Americans constitute a large and visible minority population they have been the focus of much of the existing research. Williams and his associates (Williams, 1971) at Wake Forest University have pioneered a model for conducting a racial attitude measurement for preschool populations. Williams et al. have developed and standardized the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (PRAM) which measures attitudes of preschoolers towards whites and blacks. The PRAM is based on the semantic differential technique (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) and consists of

line drawings of blacks and whites paired with either a negative or positive evaluative adjective. Studies using the PRAM-1 (and the revised PRAM-II) from 1960 through 1971 have consistently found a pro-white, anti-black bias for both white and black preschoolers, with black children showing somewhat less anti-black pro-white sentiment than white children. Hardin (1977) in a more recent investigation conducted in the Southwest with 80 kindergarten through third grade black and white children found the attitudes of white children toward black to be consistent with previous literature. However, black childrens' scores were found scores were found to be in the pro-black, anti-white direction, or a reversal of previous literature. No differences were found as a function of examiner's race.

The state of knowledge regarding racial attitude of white children toward minorities other than black is even more limited, as is our understanding of means to prevent or remediate such potential biases.

This is particularly unfortunate and problematic in regions of the country where non-blacks comprise the dominant minorities, as in the southwest region of the United States in which Mexican-Americans (Chicanos) are the most popular minority.

In an effort to improve theis situation Bernat and Balch (in press) introduced an instrument, the Chicano Racial Attitude Measure (CRAM) designed to measure racial attitudes toward Chicanos by Chicano and Anglo children. The CRAM represents an adaptation of the PRAM-II, suitable for children between five and seven years of age, and contains figures altered to represent Anglos and Chicanos. Using the CRAM with 120 Anglo and Chicano second graders, Bernat and Balch found an overwhelming pro-Anglo,

anti-Chicano bias among Anglo as well as Chicano children. Racial attitudes toward Chicanos were found not to be effected by subject's race, sex, or age.

In a subsequent investigation using CRAM Bernat and Balch examined the effects of Chicano first and second graders in a bi-cultural, bi-lingual educational program. Results cross-validated the earlier (Bernat & Balch, in press) findings of racial bias, by Chicanos toward Chicanos, while showing no significant difference in attitudes of Chicano children enrolled in traditional vs. bi-cultural educational programs. However, a significant difference was obtained, in the direction of less same-ethnicity bias for subjects in segregated (all Chicanos) vs. integrated (Chicano and Anglo) schools.

With this consistent documentation of early formed racial attitudes of white children toward minorities, especially blacks, have come intervention methods aimed at changing these beliefs. Surprisingly, as of 1965 there were only eight published studies involving attempts to modify children's racial attitudes. While research interest in this area has increased somewhat since this time, the studies published to date show a very shortsighted and piecemeal approach to this complex social problem and virtually no data is presented speaking to the long term effects of early modification or prevention attempts. The bulk of the presentation will address the kinds of strategies that have been employed to date. The focus will be on those attempts classifiable as either curriculum (or vicarious approaches) or reinforcement based approaches. We will conclude with an overview of these studies and suggestions for future research directions.

Curriculum (vicarious) approaches

Litcher and Johnson (1969) used the curriculum approach to alter racial attitudes of white second graders. They demonstrated that use, for four months, of multi-ethnic readers depicting middle-class blacks interacting with middle-class whites in a small mid-western city resulted in more favorable attitudes toward blacks by whites. In a follow-up to this study using white second graders in a metropolitan mid-western city, with a more visible black population, Litcher, Johnson, and Ryan (1973) were unable to modify these racial attitudes. This failure to replicate was attributed to different population characteristics as well as the use of fewer pictures during a shorter, one month long, curriculum unit. Similarly, in a six-week study conducted by Walker (1971) efforts to modify preschoolers' racial attitudes involving reading stories which portray Afro persons in a favorable way or portrayed Afros and Euros playing or working together in a mutually satisfying way, were not successful as measured by PRAM-II scores. Similarly negative findings are reported by McAdoo (1970) who had Afro preschoolers participate in an 18 session black consciousness curriculum conducted by Afro college students.

In a more successful venture, Singh and Yancy (1974) report the results of an intensive multi-factor program designed to reduce negative attitudes among white first graders conducted over a period of 30 school days. The experimental group consisted of 21 whites who were exposed to daily 45 minute classroom sessions covering discussions of life histories of famous American Negroes; and realistic fiction stories depicting

multi-racial situations in which blacks were portrayed in a positive manner without negative stereotypes. Filmstrips and movies geared to the subject covered were used, as appropriate, as were appropriately colored activity boxes, from which activities and token rewards designed to change racial attitudes were drawn. Art activities, multi-ethnic readers, and projects within language arts and math classes designed to reduce the readers' racial prejudice were also part of the experimental program. Results indicated a significant reduction in biased racial attitude scores for the experimental group on pre- post-administration of the PRAM-II with no changes for the controls (N=21). The changes for the experimental group brought mean scores from the biased range during pre-testing to the non-bias range during post-testing, with controls remaining in the biased category. Unfortunately, no follow-up is reported.

Best, Smith, Graves, and Williams (1975) also report the results of an investigation aimed at altering racial attitudes as measured by PRAM-II scores using the classroom curriculum approach. Seventy Euro kindergarteners were involved in an experimental curriculum designed to develop positive associations to dark-skinned persons and to the colors black and brown. The curriculum involving two 45-minute sessions a week over eight treatment weeks, consisted of children being read a story relating to "skin color, the colors black and brown, interaction between Afro and Euro children, or a black hero." These stories were followed by art activities involving black, white and brown art materials. The second weekly session involved a continuation of this format as well as participation in a game situation in which the children got to choose surprises either from a white or black can. Choosing a black can led to a candy

reward for the child, while the white can choice led to a neutral informational message. Assessment three weeks following termination of the curriculum showed no significant PRAM-II score changes for the experimental or control group (subjects from the control group had been given a non-race or color-related program). Similarly, analysis concerning race of teacher was non-significant.

Reinforcement Approaches

A series of investigations using positive reinforcment techniques and punishment (giving or taking away M & M's and pennies) to modify children's racial attitudes as measured by the PRAM have also been reported. Studies by Edwards and Williams (1970), McMurty and Williams (1972), and Gordon and Williams (1973) have found that children's selection of Euro (Anglo) figures in response to positive adjective and Afro figures in response to negative adjectives are easily modified and that these modification effects generalized to adjectives not used in the training process.

Further, studies by Williams and Edwards (1969), McAdoo (1970), Shanahan (1972), and Traynham (1974), using similar operant techniques have reported that preshcool children can be taught to reverse the tendency to evaluate the color white more positively than the color black, or to reverse the traditional bias altogether.

In the most recent investigation along these lines Best, Smith, Graves, and Williams (1975) employed operant techniques via teaching machines which provided reinforcement for pro-Afro, anti-Euro responses. Subjects were 39 Euro and Afro preschoolers enrolled in a racially integrated church related kindergarten. Each student received one of two

machine training procedures which consisted of a condition in which the child proceeded to the next item only after a correct response was made, or received an external token reinforcement for correct responses, with correct responses not necessary for the advance. Each subject received a daily training trial for each of 12 program adjectives, over a six-day period, unless a criterion level had been reached prior to this period. Assessment of PRAM-II scores one week following termination of treatment found a significant reduction in racial bias scores from pre- to post-assessment, with no significant difference related to reinforcement procedure (advance vs. token). A 12-month follow-up conducted with 30 of the 39 subjects was reported. One analysis indicated significant increases in bias to post-test to follow-up, while pre-test to follow-up showed no change. A second manner of analysis reported found a significant decrease in racial bias from pre- to follow-up assessment. However, these scores changed only from the definitely biased category to the higher range of probable bias.

In the most ambitious and well controlled study to date, Katz and Zalk (1978) compared the relative effectiveness of four short term intervention techniques for modifying negative racial attitudes in white second and fifth grade students. The subjects consisted of urban and suburban students selected for being high on the Katz-Zalk projecting prejudice test. Four experimental conditions were used and results for each condition were compared to randomly selected control subjects. The first condition was a group interaction technique in which children worked in groups of four to complete a large wooden abstract jigsaw puzzle. The experimental condition consisted of two white and two black students working together whereas four white students worked together in the con-

trol condition. In the vicarious identification condition groups of children listened to a story of a young black goy or girl who finds his/her way home from school and in the face of adversity helps get his/her grandmother to the hospital. The experinatal group was shown slides of black characters while the controls saw whites. The stimulus pre-differentiation groups consisted of two experimental phases (distinctive labels and observation of black faces) and one control group (labels with white faces). In the distinctive labels condition the children were familiarized with four individual faces in which a name was associated with each and were required to associate the correct name with the correct face. Following this, the same children were shown the same faces in sets of two and asked to judge the second slide as the same or different from the preceding one.

In the second experimental condition (exposure) children were shown the pictures of the black faces and asked to count them in groups of eight. The control condition was identical to the distinctive labels one except that white faces (differing in the same facial features) were used.

The conditioning group the children played a game in which they had to put ten positive objects (smiles) or negative objects (garbage) into one of two blue boxes, one painted with a smile and one with a frown. In the second phase the children were shown ten black or ten white animal pictures and were continually reinforced for choosing the black animal. Finally they were shown a black box and a white box and asked to sort the original pictures again to test for generalization of white-frown, black-smile. The results indicated that children exposed to short term intervention exhibit more tolerant racial attitudes on a two week post-test than controls, again indicating the malleability of children's racial

attitudes. The perceptual differentiation and vicarious conditioning procedures were more effective than group interaction or reinforcement conditions (which had little generalization effect. Four to six month follow-ups found reduced racial bias suppression, with the younger children showing the most retention of racial bias reduction.

Summary

Taken as a whole, the interventions cited, aimed at reducing racial bias using special curriculum have been largely unsuccessful, even when not held up to the scrutiny of long-term follow-up. The exceptions are the studies of Singh and Yancy and Katz and Zalk. Several important differences between the Singh and Yancy study and the others present themselves. Singh and Yancy reported the longest (i.e., 30 days) treatment and used a multi-factor approach. Curriculum was integrated into the regular classroom and the participation of a teacher highly dedicated to the program was reported. Unfortunately no follow-up was reported and therefore the long-term effectiveness or generalizability of this approach remains unclear.

The potential utility of the curriculum approach, however, is underscored by the short term results of Katz and Zalk who found this approach, along with the stimulus predifferentiation method, the most promising. Unfortunately only a single 15 minute intervention was used in that study.

This less than optimistic picture is, unfortunately, not substantially altered by the studies using reinforcement techniques to alter racial bias in children. Again, follow-ups of any meaningful duration do not exist to buttress the positive shifts reported in the studies cited. The one exception is the one-year follow-up reported by Best et al. However,

these follow-up results indicated that even the modest changes effected during treatment could not be maintained. Beyond this the utility and generalizability of the reinforcement phase studies seem somewhat limited. In each of the studies cited except Katz and Kalk the PRAM instrument was used either partially or totally for pre-test, training and post-test purposes. No data was cited to suggest generalization of lessened racial bias beyond the adjectives used in conjunction with this instrument. This, in combination with the lack of follow-up results, severaly compromises the short-term gains associated with this body of literature. Unfortunately the Katz and Zalk study also points to the problems in generalization following reinforcement based intervention.

Conclusions:

It seems clear that short-term interventions focusing on specific and narrow themes with school children already possessing biased racial attitudes appear as singularly unsuccessful. It seems imperative at this point to realize that racial bias is a difficult phenomenon to reverse once established even in the young child and efforts aimed at doing this must be calculated to take a broad and longitudinal perspective. Beyond this, efforts at prevention of such attitudes suggest themselves as a particularly useful goal. Specific deductions and recommendations from the above cited literature include:

(a) there is reason to believe that prejudice in children is formed at early ages, but are malleable to change during these early years.

(b) single modality, short term interventions are inadequate for permanent changes

(c) intervention attempts have to be of long term, longitudinal focus and integrated into ongoing process such as school and family routines.

(d) multiple modality approaches might be best attempted at this time, with the literature suggesting that curriculum (vicarious based) and approaches giving children early positive identification of various racial groups and configurations might be particularly worthy of study

(e) attention must be paid to strategies appropriate to children as they progress through various cognitive developmental stages

(f) methodological issues such as intercorrelations of various racial prejudice tests for children as well as the reliability and validity of these measures need far more attention.

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